



SYNOPSIS.

At Troyon's, a Parisian, the youth Marcel Troyon, afterwards to be known as Michael Lanyard, is caught stealing by Burke, an expert thief, who takes the boy with him to America and makes of him a finished crackman. After stealing the Omaha jewels and the Haysman war plane in London, Lanyard returns to Troyon's for the first time in many years because he thinks Roddy, a Scotland Yard man, is on his trail. On arrival he finds Roddy already installed as a guest. At dinner a conversation between Comte de Morbihan, M. Harmon and Mlle. Harmon about the Lone Wolf, a celebrated crackman who works alone, puzzles and alarms him as to whether his identity is only guessed or known. To satisfy himself that Roddy is not watching him, Lanyard dresses and goes out, leaving Roddy apparently asleep and snoring in the next room, then comes back stealthily, to find in his room Mlle. Harmon, who explains her presence by saying that she was sleep-walking. In his apartment near the Trocadero he finds written on the back of a twenty-pound note, part of his concealed emergency hoard, an invitation from The Pack to the Lone Wolf to join them. Lanyard attempts to dispose of the Omaha jewels, but finds that The Pack has forbidden the buyers to deal with him.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

To the driver of the first taxicab he met he said: "Abbey," then, shutting himself within the conveyance, he surrendered to the most morose reflections.

Nothing of his mood was, however, apparent in his manner on alighting. He bore a countenance of amiable insouciance through the portals of this festive institution, whose proudest boast and, incidentally, sole claim to uniqueness is that it never opens its doors before midnight nor closes them before dawn.

He had moved about with such celerity since entering his flat on the Rue Roger that it was even now only two o'clock, an hour at which revelry might be expected to have reached its apogee in this, the solidist smartest place in Paris.

A less sophisticated adventurer might have been flattered by the cordiality of his reception at the hands of the maître d'hôtel.

"Ah-h, M. Lanyard! But it is long since we have been so favored. However, I have kept your table for you."

"Have you, indeed?"

"Could it be otherwise, after receipt of your honored order?"

"No," said Lanyard coolly. "I presume not, if you value your peace of mind."

"Monsieur is alone?"—this with an accent of disappointment.

"Temporarily, perhaps."

"But this way, if you please."

In the wake of the functionary Lanyard traversed that frowsy anteroom, where doubtful waiters are herded on suspicion in company with the corps of automatic henchmen and figurantes, to the main restaurant, the inner sanctum toward which the naive soul of the travel-bitten Anglo-Saxon aspires so ardently.

It was not a large room; irregularly pentagonal in shape, lined with wall-seats behind a close-set rank of tables; better lighted than most Parisian restaurants, that is to say, less glaringly; ill-ventilated; the open space in the middle of the floor devoted to a handful of haggard young professional dancers, their stunted bodies more or less costumed in brilliant colors, footing it with all the vivacity to be expected of five francs per night per head; the tables occupied by parties of automatic henchmen and figurantes, to the main restaurant, the inner sanctum toward which the naive soul of the travel-bitten Anglo-Saxon aspires so ardently.

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Lanyard permitted himself to be penned in a corner behind a table, told the waiter to bring him champagne—not because he wanted it, but because it was etiquette—suppressed a yawn, lighted a cigarette, and reviewed the assemblage with a languid but shrewd glance.

He sipped his wine sparingly, without relish, considering the single subsidiary fact which did impress him with some wonder—that he was being left severely to himself; something which doesn't often fall to the lot of the unattached male at L'Abbaye. Evidently an order had been issued with respect to him. Ordinarily he would have been grateful, tonight he was merely irritated; it rendered him conspicuous.

The fixed round of delirious diversions unfolded—as per schedule. A Spanish dancing girl was given a clear floor for her specialty—which consisted in singing several verses understood by nobody—and emphasized her vivacity by making frantic dashes at and rumpling the hair of several variously surprised, indignant and flattered male guests—among these Lanyard, who submitted with resignation.

And then, just when he was on the point of consigning the Pack to the devil for inflicting upon him such cruel and inhuman punishment, the Spanish girl picked her way through the mob

of dancers who had now invaded the floor and paused beside his table.

"You're not angry, mon coco?" she pleaded with a provocative smile.

Smilingly Lanyard returned a negative.

"Then I may sit down with you and drink a glass of your wine?"

"Can't you see I've been saving the bottle for you?"

The woman plumped herself promptly into the chair opposite the adventurer. He filled her a glass.

"But you are not happy tonight?" she demanded, staring over the brim as she sipped.

"I am thoughtful," he said.

"And what does that mean?"

"I am saddened to contemplate the infirmities of my countrymen, these Americans who can't rest in Paris until they find some place as deadly as any Broadway boasts, these English who adore beautiful Paris solely because here they may continue to get drunk publicly after half past twelve!"

"Ah, then it's you are bored, is it not?" said the girl, gingerly stroking her faded, painted cheek.

"It is true; I am bored."

"Then why not go where you are wanted?" She drained her glass at a gulp and jumped up, swirling her skirts. "Your cab is waiting, monsieur—and perhaps you may find it more amusing with that Pack!"

Flinging herself into the arms of another dancing girl, she swung away, grinning impishly at Lanyard over her partner's shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII.

The High Hand.

Evidently his first move toward departure was signaled, for as he passed out through L'Abbaye's doors the carriage porter darted forward and saluted.

"M. Lanyard?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur's car is waiting."

"Indeed!" Lanyard surveyed briefly a handsome black limousine that, at pause beside the curb, was champing its bit in the most spirited fashion.

Then he smiled appreciatively. "All the same, I thank you for the compliment," he added, and forthwith tipped the porter.

But before entrusting himself to this gratuitous conveyance he put himself to the trouble of inspecting the chauffeur, who proved to be a capable-looking mechanic toggled out in rich black livery which, though relieved by a vast amount of silk braiding, was, like the car in his charge, guiltless of any sort of insignia.

"I presume you know where I want to go, my man?"

The chauffeur touched his cap: "But naturally, monsieur."

"Then take me there the quickest way."

Nodding acknowledgment of the porter's parting salute, Lanyard sank gratefully back upon uncommonly luxurious upholstery. The fatigue of the last thirty-six hours was beginning to tell on him, though his youth was still so vital, so instinct with strength and vigor that he could, if need be, go as long again without sleep.

None the less he was glad of this opportunity to snatch a few moments' rest by way of preparation against the occult culmination of this adventure.

Not telling what might ensue of this violation of all those principles which had hitherto insured his welfare!

Of a sudden, ending a ride much shorter than he would have liked, the limousine swerved in toward a curb.

Bending forward, Lanyard unlatched the door and, glancing through the window, uttered a grunt of profound disgust.

If this were the best that Pack could do—

He had hoped for something a trifle more romantic from men with wit and imagination enough to plot the earlier phases of this adventure.

The car was pulling up in front of an institution which he knew well, far too well, indeed, for his own good.

None the less he consented to get out.

"Sure you've come to the right address?" he asked the chauffeur.

Two fingers touching the vizio of his cap: "But certainly, monsieur!"

"Oh, all right!" Lanyard grumbled resignedly, and tossing a five-franc piece, addressed himself to the entrance of an outwardly commonplace and respectable hotel particulier situated in the Rue Chapul between the impasse of the Grand Guignol and the Rue Pigalle.

Now the neophyte needs the introduction of a trusted sponsor before he can win admission to the clubhouse in the Rue Chapul of the exclusive Circle of Friends of Humanity; but Lanyard's knock secured him prompt and unquestioned entrance. The unfortunate fact is he was a member in the pseudo-altruistic aims was nothing more nor less than one of these sev-

eral private gambling clubs of Paris which the French government tolerates more or less openly, despite adequate restrictive legislation; and gambling was Lanyard's ruling passion—a legacy from Bourke together with the rest of his professional equipment.

In the esteem of Paris Count Remy de Morbihan himself was scarcely a more light-hearted plunger than M. Lanyard.

Naturally, with this reputation, he was always free of the handsome salons wherein the Friends of Humanity devoted themselves to roulette, auction bridge, baccarat, and chemin de fer—and of this freedom he now proceeded to avail himself, with his hat just a shade askant on his head, his hands in his pockets, a suspicion of a smile on his lips, and a glint of the devil in his eyes—in all an expression accurately reflecting the latest phase of his humor, which had become largely one of contemptuous toleration, thanks to what he chose to consider an exhibition of insipid stupidity on the part of the Pack.

Nor was this humor in any way modified when, in due course, he confirmed anticipation by discovering M. le Comte Remy de Morbihan lounging beside one of the roulette tables, watching the play and now and then risking a maximum or two on his own account.

A flash of animation crossed the unlovely mask of the count when he saw Lanyard approaching, and he greeted the adventurer with a gay little flirt of his pudgy, dark hand.

"Ah, my friend!" he cried. "It is you, then, who have changed your mind! But this is delightful!"

"Then you really wanted to see me tonight?" Lanyard inquired innocently.

"Always—always, my dear Lanyard!" the count declared, jumping up.

"But come," he insisted, "I have a word for your private ear, if these gentlemen will excuse us."

"Dot!" Lanyard addressed in confidential tone those he knew at the table before turning away to the tug of the count's hand on his arm—"I think he means to pay up twenty pounds he owes me!"

Some derisive laughter greeted this sally.

"I mean that, however," Lanyard informed the other cheerfully, as they moved away to a corner where conversation without an audience was possible—"you ruined that Bank of England note, you know."

"Cheap at the price!" the count protested, producing his bill-fold. "Five hundred francs for an introduction to monsieur, the Lone Wolf!"

"Are you joking?" Lanyard asked blankly, and with a magnificent gesture abolished the proffered banknote.

"Joking? I! But surely you don't mean to deny—"

"My friend," Lanyard interrupted, "before we assert or deny anything, let us gather the rest of the players round the table and deal from a sealed deck. Meantime, let us rest on the understanding that I have found, at one end, a message scrawled on a banknote hidden in a secret place, at the other end, yourself, M. le Comte. Between and beyond these points exists a mystery, of which one anticipates elucidation."

"You shall have it," De Morbihan promised. "But first we must go to find those other who await us."

"Not so fast!" Lanyard interposed. "What am I to understand? That you

and I should go to find those other who await us?"

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the interview, "you must forgive me for reminding you that the morning wanes apace. I shall be going home in another hour."

De Morbihan shrugged. "Out of my great affection for you," he purred venomously, "I will do my possible. But I can promise nothing."

"I have every confidence in your powers of moral suasion, monsieur," Lanyard assured him cheerfully. "Au revoir!"

And with this, not at all ill pleased with himself, he strutted off to an adjoining table, where a high-strung section of chemin de fer was in process, possessed himself of a vacant chair, and in two minutes was so engrossed in the game that the Pack was quite forgotten.

In fifteen minutes he had won thrice as many thousands of francs.

Twenty minutes or half an hour later a hand on his shoulder broke the grasp of his besetting passion.

"Our table is made up, my friend," De Morbihan announced with his inextinguishable grin. "We're waiting for you."

"Quite at your service."

Settling his score, and finding himself considerably better off than he had imagined, he resigned his place gracefully and suffered the count to link arms and drag him away up the main staircase to the second story, where smaller rooms were set apart for parties who preferred to gamble privately.

De Morbihan rapped, turned the knob, and stood aside, bowing politely.

CHAPTER IX.

War Declared.

With a nod acknowledging the courtesy, Lanyard consented to precede him and entered a room of intimate proportions, furnished chiefly with a green-covered card table and five easy chairs, of which three were occupied—two by men in evening dress, the third by one in a well-tailored lounge suit of dark gray.

All three men wore visors of black velvet.

Lanyard looked from one to the other and chuckled quietly.

De Morbihan cleared his throat angrily and with an aggrieved air launched into introductions.

"Messieurs, I have the honor to present to your confère, M. Lanyard, best known as the Lone Wolf. M. Lanyard—the council of our association, known to you as the Pack."

The three rose and bowed ceremoniously. Lanyard returned a cool, good-natured nod. Then he laughed again and more openly:

"A pack of knaves!"

"Monsieur doubtless feels at ease?" one retorted acidly.

"In your company, Popinot? But hardly!" Lanyard returned in light contempt.

The fellow thus indicated, a burly rogue of a Frenchman in rusty and baggy evening clothes, started and flushed hotly beneath his mask; but the man next him dropped a restraining hand upon his arm, and Popinot turned, shrugged, and sank back into his chair.

"Upon my word!" Lanyard declared gracefully—"it's as good as a play! Are you sure, M. le Comte, there's no mistake—that these gay